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ABSTRACT

This position paper of the International Reading Association (IRA) calls for an immediate increase in funding for books in classroom, school, and town libraries. According to the paper, the condition of these libraries has weakened over the last decade--there are fewer books per child, and the condition of the books and the staffing of the libraries have seriously deteriorated. The position paper contends that this trend must be reversed because children who have access to books are more likely to read for enjoyment, and thus increase their reading skills and their desire to read to learn. Libraries must purchase a sufficient number of new books per student and they must make a concentrated effort to replace older materials. Genres should include picture storybooks, novels, biography, fiction and nonfiction material, magazines, poetry, and a multitude of other types to suit the interests and range of reading abilities of all children. The paper considers several questions and implications regarding children's "access to books," and offers recommendations for teachers, librarians, and school administrators, as well as for researchers. Contains 16 references and list 9 related IRA publications. (NKA)

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What does "access to books" mean?

Access to books refers to the availability of quality literature in classroom, school, community, or home libraries. Children with adequate access to books have many books to select from on a daily basis, both in and out of school. Additionally, school libraries and classrooms must have an adequate amount of reading material for each child in order to create a fair balance between children who receive access to books outside of school and those who do not. Given that there are approximately 180 days in the school year, a child should be able to select within the classroom a new book to read each day. This averages to about seven books per student in each classroom library. School libraries should have a minimum of 20 books per child to enable children to take multiple books home at each visit. This figure also takes into consideration the needs of teachers to have access to quality trade books for literature-based instruction. In addition, it is recommended that one new book per student should be added to every classroom library, and two new books per child should be added to the school library collection each year to allow for the addition of important new titles and for the elimination of books that are no longer timely. Books and other literary materials must be updated annually. Worn and out-of-date materials must be replaced with timely and enriching new works.

Access means not only availability of books, but also time for reading them (Krashen, 1996). Regular periods need to be set aside in school for independent reading. Providing access to books also includes supplying a quiet, comfortable place to read. Another important part of access is librarians and teachers who know both books and children and who can make good recommendations that match the interests of children with the content

the public library, children were allowed to check out 10 books each. Some of these books were to increase the supply of literature in their classroom library, and some books were for taking to their homes. No assignments were made in regard to using these books; however, children read more, read with more ease, and were eager to return to the library. Surveys also indicated that children requested that their parents take them back to the library. This excitement creates a positive cycle in which wider reading helps increase reading ability and interest in books.

What are the implications for this position statement at the federal, state, district, and school levels?

Miller and Shontz (1993) found that schools that had up-to-date book collections in good condition often used advisory committees to study their current books status. Additionally, many of these schools received extra funding for online access, interactive video resources, and interlibrary loans. Others used more of their federal and gift monies for books, and a higher percentage of these schools belong to networks.

The American Library Association School has recommended that school libraries plan acquisition programs that are integrated with the instructional program of their school. Such a school program should decide what types of books are needed to help the school and the library achieve instructional goals. Librarians and teachers also need financial support from school budgets for book purchases and for school librarians to help with the use of the books (Guice, 1994).

Miller and Shontz (1993) suggest that the states, regional accrediting associations, and the National Center for Education Statistics research the deterioration of library collections to

It is easy to dismiss the issue addressed in this position statement. Providing access to books is not controversial, nor does it achieve the same high profile as other educational concerns that seem to be more pressing. However, among all the issues we face, few concern a more basic educational need: that our children have access to current, quality literature. We must never allow that need to go unaddressed.

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What happens when literature is not readily available for student use?

Children become fluent readers when they have opportunities to practice reading. Without appropriate access to books, children will be taught to read, but will not develop the habit of reading. If schools fail to provide children with an opportunity to practice skills in the meaningful context of literature, substantial numbers of children will choose not to read for pleasure or for information on their own (Holdaway, 1979). Additionally, research has found a relation between the amount of time that children read for fun on their own and reading achievement (Greany, 1980; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1996; Taylor, Frye, & Maruyama, 1990). Children in classrooms without literature collections read 50% less than children in classrooms with such collections (Morrow, 1998).

How can public libraries promote children's access to books?

Public libraries are necessary partners for the provision of children's access to books. Libraries often provide their own programs for children and parents to enhance the joy of reading and easy, free access to books. In these efforts, they can and often do collaborate with schools. Ramos & Krashen (1998) carried out a study that demonstrated the value of using the public library to provide children more access to books. In this study 104 children from homes that had few or no books visited their local libraries monthly. These children had limited access to print outside of the 30 minutes each week during library visits. When visiting

obtain more precise data. This would provide information to the states, the U.S. Department of Education, and Congress, and would encourage more financial support and programs to provide children access to print materials. State associations need to become aggressive on the issue of improving our libraries and should stress the contribution made by libraries to the quality of education for children (Miller & Shontz, 1993). Associations with vested interest in the education of children, such as the International Reading Association and the American Library Association, must continue to seek legislation from local and national government officials to provide adequate funding to keep classroom and school libraries current with quality literature.

Recommendations for Teachers, Librarians, and School Administrators

- Request appropriate numbers of books for classrooms, school libraries, and public libraries.
- Inform parents and policy makers of the importance of access to books.
- Remind state and local policy makers of the need to allot funding for books.

Recommendations for Researchers

- Survey homes in each community to determine children's access to books at home.
- Continue to study the benefits of access to books to document the issue and maintain its visibility among educators, policy makers, and the public.

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Related IRA Publications

Beyond Storybooks: Young Children and the Shared Book Experience
Judith Pollard Slaughter
1993

Children's Choices (annual booklet)
International Reading Association

Family Literacy Connections in Schools and Communities
Lesley Mandel Morrow, Editor
1995

Fostering the Love of Reading: The Affective Domain in Reading Education
Eugene H. Cramer and Marietta Castle, Editors
1993

Introducción a la literatura infantil y juvenil
Isabel Schon and Sarah Corona Berkin
1996

Magazines for Kids and Teens
Donald R. Stoll, Editor
1997

Research & Professional Resources in Children's Literature: Piecing a Patchwork Quilt
Kathy G. Short, Editor
1995

Teachers' Choices (annual booklet)
International Reading Association

Young Adults' Choices (annual booklet)
International Reading Association

The International Reading Association calls for an immediate increase in funding for books in classroom, school, and town libraries. The condition of these libraries has weakened over the last decade; there are fewer books per child, and the condition of the books and the staffing of the libraries have seriously deteriorated. We must reverse this trend because children who have access to books are more likely to read for enjoyment, and thus increase their reading skills and their desire to read to learn. The purpose of this position statement is to emphasize the importance of increased, dedicated funding for the purchase of quality literature of multiple genres. Libraries must purchase a sufficient number of new books per student and they must make a concentrated effort to replace older materials for each classroom and school library on an annual basis. Genres should include picture storybooks, novels, biography, fiction and nonfiction material, magazines, poetry, and a multitude of other types to suit the interests and range of reading abilities of all children.

Why is it important for children to have access to books?

A strong research base supports the importance of access to books. Children who are allowed to self-select to read and who have access to varied sources of print materials in their classrooms, school libraries, town libraries, and at home, read more and read more widely, both for pleasure and for information. Children who do a substantial amount of voluntary reading demonstrate positive attitudes toward reading, and these students tend to be the best readers (Calkins, 1996; Greaney, 1980; Krashen, 1994).

Frequent reading is related to the development of sophisticated language structures, higher levels of comprehension, improved word analysis skills, and fluency. Significant amounts of voluntary reading are associated with greater interest and skill development (Irving, 1980). In one study, kindergarten children who demonstrated a voluntary interest in books were rated by their teachers as displaying high performance in all areas of school achievement. They also performed well on a standardized achievement test (Morrow, 1983). In other studies, classrooms were filled with large numbers of trade books, and teachers were asked to encourage free reading. Improvement in children's reading achievement, gains in vocabulary and comprehension, and increased reading were noted, and better attitudes toward reading were reported than were exhibited by children in comparison schools who did not participate in such programs (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Fielding, Wilson, & Anderson, 1986; Ingham, 1981).



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